

# A Journey Over the Main Range from Perak to Pahang.

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In the year 1885 Sir Frank (then Mr.) Swettenham with Messrs. Giles and Lester made a journey across the Malay Peninsula from West to East, of which an account is published in the *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* for the month of June 1885.

Swettenham and his party travelled up the Bernam and the Slim river to the present village of that name, thence over the range which separates Perak and Pahang; down the whole length of the Lipis river from the extreme 'ulu' to its junction with the Jelai and so down the Pahang river to the sea.

The latter half of the journey was made through country which is now well known and fully opened up. At Kuala Dum (or Dong as the name is now spelt) the Lipis river meets the Pahang Trunk Road from Raub and from there to Kuala Lipis the road follows the course of the river.

But the country between Ulu Slim and Batu Talam, a kampong about ten miles above Kuala Dong, is still comparatively unknown to Europeans with the exception of an occasional prospector and a few Government servants in Ulu Pahang; and an account of the changes which the passage of thirty years has brought about may be of some interest. From Ulu Slim to Kuala Dong, a distance of about 55 miles, there are no roads or bridle paths but only the usual Malay, Chinese or Sakai path of about two feet wide.

After leaving Slim, where there is a pretty but somewhat dirty halting bungalow on the bank of the river, a bridle path takes one through flourishing kampongs and padi fields to Ulu Slim. Ulu Slim looks a prosperous little kampong; but the silt from the French Company's tin mine about two miles up stream seems to be doing a good deal of damage to the padi fields there. Leaving the kampong, a mining track passes through the French Co.'s mine, where the Sakai mistresses of some of the Chinese kepalas were very much in evidence, and then, crossing the Slim river, follows the right bank of the Briseh river.

Both the Slim and Briseh rivers are here beautifully clear and swift streams, full of rapids and small waterfalls and carrying during the greater part of the year a considerable volume of water.

I spent the first night in the same place as Swettenham's party at Safar Batu. This is an enormous boulder overhanging a granite ledge, and, as the Briseh flows about fifty feet below, it forms an ideal place for a camp and is invariably used by the Malays, who bring buffaloes from Pahang for sale in Slim, and by the Chinese



carrying down tin ore from the few mines on the Pahang side of the range. Eleven coolies and myself all slept under this rock, in comfort and completely sheltered from the heavy rain, which fell during the greater part of the night.

From Safar Batu to the top of the pass there is first a stiff climb of about a quarter of a mile and then a steady rise. Just below the top there is one of the 'Batu Gajah' which are so numerous in Pahang, where any large rock of peculiar shape seems to impress the native mind with its likeness to an elephant. This particular one was 'Kramat', and each cooly was careful to pull up a young bamboo shoot and deposit it on the rock as fodder for the tutelary genius of the place.

From the French mine to the top of the pass, we came across no house or human being of any sort and except at the very first no trace of any old or new Sakai clearings.

In two places we saw tracks of 'Kambing Gerun' and I got a good pair of horns from the Sakais lower down stream.

Swettenham gives the height of the pass as 3150 feet, which is 350 feet higher than the Gap between Kuala Kubu and Raub. The rise is so gradual, with the exception of the steep bit above Safar Batu, that, until I read Swettenham's article, I was under the impression that the height was only about 2400 feet.

The descent on the Pahang side is very much steeper. I followed the same path as Swettenham, crossing the S. Sembilan, a series of nine small streams, and then down the Sungei Kenor to its mouth.

There are one or two small Chinese mines on this river, working fairly rich land, but, owing to the almost prohibitive cost of transport (about \$8 or \$9 a picul), they shut down whenever the price of tins falls below a certain figure. The Sungei Kenor and Sungei Sentol join each other about three miles from the Lipis and the combined stream is called the Kenor. The left hand branch (going up stream), which is apparently the one which Swettenham calls the Kenor, is now called the Sentol and the right hand branch the Kenor. The Sentol for about a quarter of a mile above its mouth runs about ten feet underground (gugop). Its course is marked by a collection of large round boulders and the running water underneath can be plainly heard.

The information given to Swettenham that the Sungei Kenor has here already received the waters of the true Lipis is not correct. The river into which the Sungei Kenor flows is known as the Lipis for at least five miles above Kuala Kenor, the two chief tributaries up stream being the Sungei Kenohong and S. Tabalak.

The 1912 map of Pahang is quite inaccurate in this locality. Since it was issued, a few mining surveys have been carried out here and a traverse made up the Lipis River from Ulu Sungei, which will no doubt ensure the accuracy of the next map. Swettenham makes little mention of Sakais in this locality and they do not appear to have been numerous. There are now a number at Kuala



Kenor and still more at Kuala Buntu a few miles down stream. They are very civilised, have been settled at this spot for at least fifteen years and have a number of coconut trees in bearing. One or two of them actually own mosquito nets. They do not tattoo or disfigure themselves in any way and the younger men and women are quite prepossessing.

They do a certain amount of carrying tin ore for the Chinese miners. On one occasion a few weeks ago one of them who had carried ore down to Raub was arrested by a zealous constable and charged under the Crimes Prevention Enactment with being abroad without a lamp after 9 p.m. He was a picture of bewildered anxiety in the dock. His Chinese employer had lent him a clean blue baju to appear in but, when discharged with a caution, he had nothing on below it except the most exiguous loin cloth I have ever seen. The effect was charming!

Just below Kuala Buntu is Permatang Linggi, a long stretch of fairly level land on the right bank of the Lipis. Here Swettenham found an extensive Malay Kampong ruled by a headman named Toh Bakar. The land was abandoned by Malays some 15 years ago; but a stretch of secondary jungle along the river is still known as 'Belukar Toh Bakar.' We came across fresh tracks of seladang here, and the Sakais say that there is a herd, which never strays far from these old clearings.

Toh Bakar's son Usop, whom Swettenham mentions, is alive and living near Kuala Chena'a between Dong and Lipis. His recollections of the white men are vivid inasmuch as he was attacked by the cholera, which Swettenham mentions and which was apparently brought into Pahang by some of the Malay carriers from Slim. According to old men here, the epidemic spread down the river as far as Kuala Lipis and caused over two hundred deaths.

A few families of Slim Malays have recently re-entered upon the land, which was formerly Toh Bakar's. Their headman is one Pawang Sungei of Ulu Slim, who has a great reputation as a pawang in Ulu Pahang. One of his feats is said to be staying under water without rising to the surface for an hour. He is a wonderful walker and has an unrivalled knowledge of the hills of the main range from Kenong northwards. A mile below Permatang Linggi is the mouth of the Klang river, a fairly large stream, on which there is a well known 'sesap' or salt-lick, a favourite resort of sambhur deer. I spent the night there on the chance of a shot but without success, though I twice heard a deer 'bertempek' close by in the jungle. Just before dawn however a tapir entered the lick and proceeded to indulge in what I imagine must have been the longest drink on record. I did not time it but at least five minutes elapsed before the animal lifted its head from the stream. The tapir was in the lick about fifteen minutes and passed within ten feet of me on its way out.

Five miles below Kuala Klang is Ginting Selebah where about six Sakai families have been settled for some years. A feature of



the place is a large drove of pig, real jungle pig either caught when young or bred by the Sakais. They are tame with the Sakais and follow the women about, but the old sow, an enormous beast, is a terror to any of the Malays who pass this way. There is a lot of 'Getah Taban' in this locality. About six miles below Ginting Sebah is Ulu Sungei, the first settled Malay Kampong on the S. Lipis. Swettenham and his party stayed the night here, and the place can hardly have changed at all since his visit, save that the ubiquitous Chinaman has now opened a shop. About nine years ago a bridal path was opened from Ulu Sungei to Raub, a distance of sixteen miles, but there was very little traffic along it and it has now dwindled down to the usual jungle path.

Swettenham does no more than justice to the beauty of the river scenery from Permatang Linggi downwards. The river varies in width from twenty to forty yards, with beautifully clear water and numbers of small rapids. Here and there are rows of Gapis trees along the banks, whose branches meet over the stream and afford a grateful shade in the noonday heat. As yet the various small mines in the ulu of the tributaries of the Lipis are not working extensively enough to foul the river. But there is a good deal of tin up here and I fear that the time will come when instead of a river crystal clear we shall have the turbid flood that is seen in most of the Ulu Pahang rivers, once as lovely as the Lipis. Then only on a moonlight night when the brown stream is turned to silver, will it be possible to gain an idea of the beauty of the river when undefiled.

Seven miles below Ulu Sungei lies Batu Talam, a large Kampong with extensive padi fields. Haji Besar, whom Swettenham mentions as his messenger to the Sultan of Pahang, is still living there, a very old man now.

At Tersang a little lower down Swettenham found twenty Chinese working for gold, but this mine has now gone the way of almost all the other gold mines in Pahang. Up to 1913 two old Chinese miners used to eke out a precarious living there; but now even they have abandoned the place.

At Dong the Imam Prang Penghulu, with whom Swettenham had an interview is still alive now pensioned and succeeded by his son-in-law. He remembered Swettenham's visit perfectly and also that of Major Cameron, who was the first white man to be seen in this part of Pahang.

Five miles from Dong is Sega and two miles beyond, the 'Jeram Besu,' down which the Malays refused to take Swettenham. The Malays here say that Sir Hugh Clifford is the only white man who has been down the rapid. Owing to the silting up of the river by mining on the S. Liang and S. Sempam, I do not think that any raft could get through now.

Imam Teh, the present penghulu of Sega, is the hero of two of the tales in Sir H. Clifford's book "Malay Monochromes." I read the tales to the old man who was very interested, especially as



the occurrences narrated therein were quite new and unknown to him! Beyond the 'Jeram Besu' the Raub district ends.

Generally speaking the changes which the last 30 years have brought about, whether in the opening up of the country or in the outlook of the Malays on life in general, are surprisingly small. There is undoubtedly a certain amount of tin on the Pahang side of the range, but unless a road is made up the Lipis, the expense of transport will retard development. As regards agriculture, there are hundreds of square miles of better agricultural land in Pahang, and I think it would be safe to predict that thirty years on from now, this part of the Peninsula will not differ greatly from what it was, when the first white man, Major Cameron, came down the Lipis river in the early eighties.

